

What is diphtheria?

Diphtheria is a disease caused by bacteria that usually affect the tonsils, throat, nose, or skin.

Who gets diphtheria?

Diphtheria is a rare disease that is most likely to occur where people who have not been vaccinated live in crowded conditions.

How is diphtheria spread?

Diphtheria is transmitted to others through close contact with discharge from an infected person's nose, throat, skin, and eyes.

What are the symptoms of diphtheria?

There are two types of diphtheria. One type involves the nose and throat, and the other involves the skin. Symptoms include sore throat, low-grade fever and enlarged lymph nodes located in the neck. A membrane may form across the throat. Skin lesions may be painful, swollen and reddened. A person with diphtheria may have no symptoms.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms usually appear two to five days after exposure, with a range of one to six days.

When and for how long is a person able to spread diphtheria?

Untreated people who are infected with the diphtheria bacteria are usually contagious for up to two weeks, and seldom more than four weeks. If treated with appropriate antibiotics, the contagious period can be limited to less than four days.

Does past infection with diphtheria make a person immune?

Recovery from diphtheria is not always followed by lasting immunity.

Is there a vaccine for diphtheria?

Diphtheria toxoid is usually combined with tetanus toxoid and pertussis vaccine to form a triple vaccine known as DTP. This vaccine should be given at two, four, six, and 15 months of age, and between four and six years of age. Everyone should also receive a combination of tetanus toxoid and diphtheria toxoid (Td) every 10 years to maintain immunity.

What is the treatment for diphtheria?

Certain antibiotics, such as penicillin and erythromycin, can be prescribed for the treatment of diphtheria.

What can be the effect of not being treated for diphtheria?

If diphtheria goes untreated, serious complications such as heart failure and nerve

disorders may occur. Death occurs in about 5-10% of all cases.

How can diphtheria be prevented?

The single most effective control measure is maintaining the highest possible level of immunization in the community. Other methods of control include prompt treatment of cases and a community surveillance program.

Anyone who has close contact with a person with diphtheria will be tested for the disease, given an antibiotic and an immunization, and possibly kept away from school or work until it is clear that they are free of the disease.

